

Naperville Sun January 13, 1984

Environmentalist: agencies reacted slowly to cyanide

During Saturday's Naperville anti-cyanide protest, one speaker charged that environmental officials have been slow to move, in protecting the public against cyanide contamination.

Joyce Rosenthal, of the Great Lakes chapter of the Greenpeace organization, said the U.S. and State Environmental Protection Agencies have "failed to act responsibly" since trailers full of contaminated film chips were discovered in the Chicago area last May.

According to Michael O'Toole, an environmental engineer for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in Chicago, there were initially nine sites in the Chicago area with contaminated chips. Those have been consolidated to six sites.

O'Toole said one site is in Chicago, where 37 trailers are located, including 10 with cyanide-contaminated chips. There are 28 trailers with contaminated chips in Rosemont; 26 trailers in Hodgkins; 14 in McCook; 27 in Summit; and 18 in Chicago Ridge. There are also contaminated chips stored in a warehouse located between Amboy and Dixon, Ill.

The chips are the end-product of a process which uses cyanide to extract silver from film. The proposed test-burn at the C-E Raymond Laboratory, 2151 Fisher dr., during the week of Jan. 23, will utilize a 2,000-pound sample of chips, to measure the effectiveness of high-temperature incineration as a means for disposal.

The Greenpeace representative said no action was taken by environmental officials until last week, to secure the trailers.

She said the contaminated materials should be secured in indoor storage, until a "more responsible plan" for

their "safe detoxification" can be created. She added that the test-burn in Naperville offers few assurances of safety.

O'Toole told The SUN that unsuccessful efforts to detoxify the material began last summer, when the Illinois Attorney General's Office attempted to have the responsible parties pay for a clean-up. However, that effort ran out of money Aug. 1, after 1,500,000 pounds of chips were chemically treated, leaving 14,500,000 pounds untreated.

The Illinois EPA subsequently discovered the trailers were leaking, and hired its own contractor to seal them up. That work was completed Sept. 1, O'Toole said. However, after a subsequent heavy rain, the trailers were discovered to still be leaking, and the USEPA on Sept. 19 was officially asked to seal them.

The USEPA, after a dry weather inspection, mistakenly concluded the trailers were in stable condition, O'Toole said, and began working on a plan for disposal of the material.

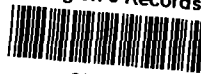
On Oct. 6, during a rain-

fall, the Metropolitan Sanitary District found cyanide-contaminated run-off from the trailers. USEPA inspections on Oct. 14 and 17 confirmed the leakage, and federal "superfund" money was used to hire a contractor to seal the trailers with a polyurethane foam which hardens in place, O'Toole said. Action began Nov. 17 and was concluded last week. Some material was also off-loaded from leaking trailers, and placed in "roll-off box" containers.

O'Toole said the USEPA has considered the idea of moving the material into hazardous waste indoor storage, but has concluded that would be too expensive. He said the agency was informed that it would cost \$400,000 just to move the material in new trailers; decontaminate the current sites; and decontaminate and dispose of the old trailers. That figure does not include the cost of storage, he said.

The USEPA concluded it would be better to stabilize the material at the site "and keep an eye on" the trailers, he said.

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